

TULAREMIA (Rabbit Fever)

What is tularemia?

Tularemia is a potentially serious illness that usually occurs naturally in Utah. Tularemia is caused by the bacteria *Francisella tularensis*, which is found in animals (especially rabbits).

Who gets tularemia?

Anyone can get tularemia if they spend time outdoors in areas where infected animals, deerflies or ticks, can be found. Rabbit hunters, trappers, and laboratory workers exposed to the bacteria are at higher risk. Most cases occur during the summer months when deerflies and ticks are abundant and the early winter months during rabbit hunting season.

How is tularemia spread?

The most common way tularemia is spread is by the bite of an infected insect such as a deerfly or tick. Another way people get tularemia is by getting blood or tissue from infected animals (especially rabbits) in their eyes, mouth, or in cuts or scratches on the skin. Tularemia can also be spread by handling or eating rabbit meat that is not cooked well or by drinking water that has been contaminated by the bacteria. Tularemia can be spread as an infectious agent through the air; people can then inhale the bacteria and become ill.

What are the symptoms of tularemia?

The usual symptoms of tularemia are fever, chills, headache, and other flu like symptoms. Painful swollen lymph nodes and red sores at the point of the bite are also symptoms of tularemia.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually appear within three to five days after exposure (can be from one to twenty one days).

What is the treatment for tularemia?

Antibiotics such as streptomycin and gentamicin are used to treat tularemia.

What can be done to prevent the spread of tularemia?

1. Avoid biting insects
2. Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants while outdoors

3. Use mosquito netting when sleeping outdoors or in an unscreened structure and to protect small children.
4. Use insect repellents that contain DEET (N, N-diethyl-m-toluamide) while outdoors.
 - Follow all instructions on the label
5. Children should be discouraged from handling sick or dead rabbits, or other possibly infected animals.
6. Gloves should be worn when skinning or handling animals, especially wild rabbits.
7. Wild rabbit meat should be thoroughly cooked.
8. Face masks, gowns, and rubber gloves should be worn by those working with cultures or infective material in a laboratory.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal doctor
- Your local health department, listed in the telephone directory
- The Utah Department of Health, Bureau of Epidemiology (801) 538-6191

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